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Testimony: Appropriations Committee

H.B. No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES
FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017

February 18, 2016

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Melissa Marshall. I live in West Hartford and I'm here today in my capacity as Coordinator of the Connecticut Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance, a coalition representing people from all disability groups. I'm here today to urge you to oppose cuts to the DMHAS, DPH, DDS budgets.

Occasionally, in a coalition such as the Alliance, there is disagreement about approaches to situations or priorities. The Connecticut Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance is very clear and in complete agreement that the Governor's proposed budget is injurious to people with disabilities across the board. Last week, many of us testified in opposition to the DORS budget which would eliminate Centers for Independent Living. Tonight, we are advocating for very basic needs of people with intellectual disabilities and people receiving services from the DMHAS and DPH.

I will begin with the cuts to DMHAS. This is not in order of priority; each set of cuts will be devastating to their respective disability communities. First, we oppose specific cuts. The proposed budget effectively eliminates the Regional Mental Health Boards. This will ultimately cost the state money. The five Regional Mental Health Boards with two staff each mobilize 500 volunteers annually. The Boards' collaboration helps bring in \$23 million in federal funds to the state. Plus, they are a vital liaison between the state local communities and service providers. The Boards assess service needs and evaluate services to ensure that the state is spending its dollars efficiently.

Other direct cuts will be devastating and should be stopped. This includes carrying forward \$17 million in cuts from the current year. Grant reduction for mental health and substance abuse services should be stopped. Although almost \$16 million is projected in savings based on reimbursements to providers under the ACA, these reimbursements are insufficient to cover the actual cost of services. Cuts to Community Care Teams, don't make fiscal sense either. This program has already been demonstrated to save the state money by encouraging collaboration between hospitals and community care providers to stabilize individuals who live in the community.

We oppose consolidation of agency and operating funds into one line item. The legislature should have input into where and how tax dollars are spent. Programs that are vital mental health services would be consolidated and subject to \$34 million in cuts. These programs include the Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Jail Diversion, Young Adult Services, home and community-based services, discharge and diversion services, housing and support services, grants for mental health services and employment opportunities and grants for substance abuse services. All of these programs save the state money. The state must begin to look to solutions that don't end up costing the state money in the long term.

We also oppose cuts to the Department of Public Health's school-based health centers. Do not cut is already underfunded vital service.

The state needs to continue to invest in supportive housing. The evidence clearly demonstrates that supportive housing ultimately saves money in Medicaid expenses.

Now I turn to the DDS budget. Those of you serve on the I/DD Caucus are all too familiar with the pain faced by people with intellectual disabilities and their families in the state. We urge you to stop the \$59 million cuts to DDS. People with I/DD are already going without vital services.

Ironically, despite these difficult fiscal times and calls from people with disabilities, family members, advocates and national experts to close Southbury Training School and the five Regional Centers the state continues to fund them with precious state resources. Keeping them open is a wasteful use of state dollars.

We request that DDS develop a concrete plan for savings that can be achieved by improving management practices, cuts to excessive overtime, unit consolidations in institutions and public to private group home conversions. It is imperative that DDS savings be diverted into the DDS waiting lists and into community based supports, as would be required under

HB 5128. In the long term \$90 million in savings from the closure of Southbury Training School and the Regional Centers should be captured to serve people with ID/D.

The State of Connecticut must break its pattern of making shortsighted budget cuts that will in the end cost the State a significant amount of money and not making cuts to institutions which are costly, ineffective and hurtful to people disabilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration today.